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TRAILSIDE ACTIONS AND REACTIONS

THE NATURE TRAILS AND TRAILSIDE MUSEUM
AT BEAR MOUNTAIN, N. Y.

WILLIAM H. CARR

Assistant Curator, Department of Public Education



SCHOOL SERVICE SERIES NUMBER FIVE

Department of Public Education
THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
77th Street and Central Park West
New York City

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WHAT THE BEAVER DOES

All posts used in the stand were cut and peeled by beaver. The model rests on a shelf. It shows a typical beaver colony in relief. Pictures, footprints and a beaver skull complete the exhibit (see page 32).

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Photographs by M. PETER KEANE



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FOREWORD

The Nature Trails and Trailside Museum at Bear Mountain, New York, are operated by the Department of Public Education of the American Museum of Natural History. During the past four years, increased interest has been shown by added numbers of visitors, letters of commendation, and by various reports of activity in the press and in both popular and educational journals and magazines. Three other publications describing the work are:

SIGNS ALONG THE TRAIL—1927

BLAZING NATURE'S TRAIL—1928

TRAILSIDE CONVERSATIONS—1929

For additional information and for these publications, address:

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WHERE THE TRAIL BEGINS

TRAILSIDE ACTIONS AND REACTIONS

"In the woods a man casts off his years as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life is always a child."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

TO observe the actions and reactions of city-bred people left to their own devices in open country, is enlightening. Clerks, factory employees, and other types of metropolitan workers, not to forget teachers and executives, are new beings away from their local surroundings. Their behavior sometimes passes all understanding as it changes rapidly from the ordinary to the extraordinary. We have been observing them for a number of years and find it a fascinating study.

One Sunday afternoon in August, we walked slowly along the Bear Mountain Nature Trails. At least sixty thousand people were in the Bear Mountain section of the Harriman State Park that day. Some five thousand of these pleasure seekers would wander our way before the Hudson River boats returned them to New York City. Every smooth, rocky surface along the trails had been preëmpted by picnickers and by those who merely wished to rest. Every shady spot was host to a group of noisy or quiet people who munched sandwiches, pickles, pears, apples, and any number of other foods, some very strange in nature. It was an exceedingly warm day, and all our guests were content to rest awhile in the new surroundings. We counted at least ten nationalities among those present. Even Nature Trails may add fuel to the great American melting pot. Grown men and women, boys and girls, alike, had shed as much clothing as they possibly could and still be somewhat covered. Shoeless feet, coatless and sometimes shirtless backs, bared legs and arms were all exposed to the common gaze. It apparently seemed a most acceptable thing, to these visitors, to make themselves as free as possible in the woods. Many of them threw city-born convention literally to the winds and disported themselves with far greater freedom than they would in their own respective and possibly respected neighborhoods.

Freedom

Out-of-doors

It was a complete mental, yes, and physical relapse; a letting down of barriers demanded by rulings of social restriction. Yet it was a truly average crowd with whom we had to deal, week in and week out.

Within view of the majority of these lunchers and loungers, were signs placed on trees, rocks, and flowers, bordering the path leading from the boat dock ramp to the Trailside Museum. These labels told stories of the identification of various natural objects, of their commercial uses, and gave suggestions as to their inspirational value. Interspersed among many signs of this type were

**Signs of
Interest**



A TRIPOD SIGN

Father and the girls, on the Nature Trail.

directional arrows, pointing the way to the museum. Although the tags were numerous, they were located in fairly inconspicuous places. Nevertheless, about fifty percent of them were read and possibly twenty percent were mentally digested.

We knew that, once the picnicking was over, about half of the people, tired of inaction, would wander down the trail to our focus point at the Trailside Museum.

Across the state road not far off came the blaring noise of three mechanical loud speakers playing the "Stein Song" and "It Happened in Old Monterey." They advertised various amusements, pop drinks, and the like. Splashing, noisy crowds filled the swimming pool, near the start of the trails. However, there were at least three thousand visitors to the Trailside

**Nature and
Noise**



A PAUSE TO READ

Tree labels are small. One has to search for them.

Museum that day. The lure of natural history, of an interest in living objects, and of easily acquired information, was strong enough to compete with "attractions" across the road.

Someone suggested that we, too, acquire a loud speaker and play Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" to offset the jazz. Well, our trails, leading as they do through one of the most beautiful sections of all the

Hudson Highlands, provided all the "Spring Song" necessary. Furthermore, it was a natural song, too. The music of breezes in tree tops, of birds, and of singing insects sufficed. We needed no blatant screeching to "draw the crowds"!

What a splendid opportunity has the nature trail and out-of-door museum director to study applied psychology! The whims, the likes and dislikes of people, the inclinations to do this or that, or to notice some things and ignore others, are all faithfully demonstrated. It is really a working laboratory, not only of the actions of plants and wild animals, but of the human animal as well!

**Trailside
Psychology**



VIRGINIA CREEPER FRAMES THE PICTURE

A section of the field trail where nearly all labels are of a botanical nature.

We have divided the receptive actions, the abilities or inclinations of people to grasp certain presented facts and ideas into three major parts:

1.—The ones who read virtually every label along the trails and in



NEW TYPE ARROWS

An electric needle was used to burn the letter outlines.



SIGN ON STATE ROAD

These large signs were placed near the Bear Mountain Bridge Entrance

the museum; who make notes, ask questions, and converse freely about subjects offered. (About 20%)

2.—The group reading about half the trail labels and being invariably interested in everything the museum has to offer. (About 40%)

3.—Those who read only a few labels, spend but little time in the museum, and are plainly bent on enjoying their own company to the exclusion of everything else. (About 40%)

In order to entice this last group, we must be constantly on the alert to evolve means and methods of attracting their eyes and minds along unaccustomed channels. We must discover methods of providing counter-attractions to things that would, in the ordinary course of events, lead elsewhere. At the same time, we have to remember not to offend the intelligence or sensibilities of the first two groups.

One interested and consequently interesting visitor, accosting us on the trails, asked:

“What type of person do you consider most difficult to attract along the lines of natural history, here in the open?” “Well,” we answered, “the most difficult types are not boys and girls, as one might think, or their parents, and not the young men and women in separated groups, either. We find that **Couples on the Trail** couples, from the ages of about nineteen to twenty-four or five, require ‘treatment’ in several directions. A very large percentage of our visitors, especially during weekends, is made up of young couples out for the day. The Hudson River boats bring them to the Park in thousands.”

“I suppose,” said the visitor, glancing at several strolling couples, “that you have learned a special approach, a particular technique in handling this situation? From what I have observed, it seems to me that these young people are primarily interested in each other!”

“That’s very true,” we replied. “They are quite taken up with their own affairs. They have doubtless been cooped in offices for a solid week and, with the exception of several evenings spent at some motion picture theater, have waited for Sunday with considerable anticipation, knowing that on this day they will be together for a very happy length of time. On these occasions, they happen on our trails and eventually reach our museum. We have ample opportunity either to attract or lose them as far as our ambition to interest them in natural history is concerned.”

“I know,” returned the guest, “I can see the importance of educating these particular groups, but how do you catch them?”

"We arrange things so that they catch themselves!" we answered. "You remember the Biblical quotation about 'the ways of a man with a maid'? It is most often used as an excuse, a sort of dispensation for conduct, or an expiation for the 'all's fair in love and war' idea, and the results thereof. We know, very well, that the average male, accompanied by a companion of the opposite sex, is especially joyful when he is in a position to surprise his friend with the fruits of his own knowledge. He is not at all adverse to impressing her in any way he can. He likes to



A JAY AND A SMILE

Our tame bluejay was a great favorite with younger visitors.

have a ready answer for her questions, and delights in relating anecdotes of his own prowess along certain lines. Just stand in a corner of our little museum on an active Sunday and listen to the explanations of some young fellow as he lectures to his admiring 'lady friend!'"

"I've heard them!" said the man with a smile. "All one has to do, to be entertained in that way, is to visit the Aquarium in New York City or the Bronx Zoo!"

"Yes, and no doubt you noted, if you listened to these dialogues, that the young woman in question was perfectly willing to be impressed!



MR. B. T. B. HYDE

"Uncle Bennie," was a pioneer in nature work in the Palisades Interstate Park. Although no longer associated with the Park, he is nevertheless keenly interested in the work, for he established the first, large out-of-door museum in the region.

It is all part of the world's greatest game, and therefore we have taken steps to help play that game.

"Here, along the trails, as you have seen, labels on plants and rocks serve as introductions to a very elementary study of nature. They are all extremely simple and, in many instances, provide entertainment as well as more serious consideration of the subject at hand. At the Trailside Museum, however, we have the best chance to speak to these people.

"They discover many living creatures, all commonly found in the nearby woods, ponds, and streams. We have a series of typed labels, many accompanied by diagrams and pictures, to tell of life histories, habits, and other details of interest to the visitor. There are representatives of various branches of the animal kingdom—birds, reptiles, mammals, insects, fish, and amphibians—all in cages or aquariums in plain view.

"When our visitors have finally reached the museum building, after at least fifteen minutes spent on the trails, they are usually glad to see concrete evidence of animal life. The sciences of botany and geology are also represented in the museum, but, due to the fact that these two subjects are more readily amplified along the trails, the animals hold prominent positions indoors."

We had walked along to the museum and at this point our newly made friend, seeing some acquaintances, left me without having investigated fully our means of interesting the "young couples" in whom he had shown an understanding interest.

In the Trailside Museum, a large group surrounded the cage where our young Blue Jay held forth. We never had realized that a Jay could sing and trill as sweetly as this bird did. Indeed, he was one of our main attractions and never failed to fascinate an admiring audience.

A young man, arm in arm with an attractive girl who wore a wedding ring in the proper place and who had obviously not worn it long, stood admiring the bird that was singing away, apparently oblivious of the crowd. Some of the notes were reedy and others had a metallic, "churring" effect.

"It sounds like a locust," said the man.

"What is a locust? Is it a bird?" asked his companion, innocently.

"Oh, no! It's some kind of beetle that flies only at night," returned her husband. "I used to live where you would hear these beetles and Blue Jays singing together. You could hardly tell one from the other!"

"I see. It must be wonderful to know all about things the way you do!"

They walked away at this point, pausing for awhile in front of the mouse cage. Here a White-foot mouse slept, in plain view, in a miniature "cave" formed of stones. In the center of the cage was a little revolving wheel wherein the mouse exercised as in a treadmill. He used the wheel so much that it clearly showed evidences of wear where tiny feet had propelled it around and around.

"What a cute little mouse!" exclaimed the girl. "Why do they have a wire wheel in there? Does the mouse use it for something?"



SNAKES

These cages contained live reptiles. Signs, pictures and diagrams gave instruction.

"I'll tell you why the wheel's there," said the man after a thoughtful pause. "They put it in so the mouse can't get away. He runs up to the wheel and is afraid of it. He's afraid to go beyond to where the cage door is. Do you see?"

His co-walker plainly did not see. She looked a bit skeptical, yet her words belied her expression.

"Yes, of course," she answered, "what a good idea!"

On top of the cage was a little glass bottle of alcohol, containing the unborn young of a White-foot mouse. These well developed embryos,



STUDY TABLE

Persons who wished to read and write were invited to use this table.



CHANGING WATER

Fresh water was frequently given to the inhabitants of tanks in the Trailside Museum.



THE "LIVE SIDE"

This end of the Trailside Museum was entirely devoted to an exhibition of living creatures.

with a label attached, could be picked up and thoroughly examined. The sign read:

"Embryo White-Footed Mice"

"These unborn young are interesting in that they represent several stages of development. Notice the absence of coloring, the progressive growth and the position of the limbs. Compare the appearance of these embryos with the eggs and young of the frogs and toads at the other end of the museum—also with the bird's embryo exhibit."

At this spot, a little bench was placed for the convenience of visitors who wished to spend some time observing the objects on display.

The young man and his wife rested here while they examined the embryo, and they were practically alone.

"What are those little things?" asked the girl.

Her husband studied the bottle's contents and read the label carefully before he answered.

"Why, they are very young mice that haven't been born yet. See that mouse there in the cage? Well, these things here, called 'embryos,' were taken from the mother. If they had been born, they would have grown up and looked like this mouse."

"That's wonderful!" said the girl. "I've often wondered what some animals look like before they leave the mother. Here, let me have the bottle."

She, too, examined the exhibit very closely, while we, who looked on unobserved, marvelled, as we often have on previous occasions, at the wonder expressed in faces of persons who receive a valuable and greatly appreciated idea for the first time.

The young woman with perfect frankness and candor, born of modern times, said:

"I didn't know that animals unborn looked anything like their parents! Why, look, these things have a head and legs just like the mouse there in the cage! Just think, the mother carries all these young ones! I think it is the most wonderful thing I ever learned!"

"It is the most wonderful thing," said her husband, quietly. "I thought you knew about it. Come, let's look at the bird and frog exhibit. You must learn more."

And so the two went over to the other end of the museum and eventually out of the door. Perhaps we shall never see them again; but we have not the slightest doubt that here was a young woman whose trip to our museum was not made in vain.



SAW AND HAMMER

Several new sheds and exhibition places were built by our own staff.

It is vitally important to teach some of the "facts of life" in all public museums, no matter how small. I suppose the majority of our visitors would consider themselves fortunate to have enjoyed a high school education, where it is doubtful whether they learned much of fundamental value, as far as life and living are concerned.

Nature is so all inclusive that virtually all of the life story may be told when natural history education enters the field, as it should, to enlighten people about themselves as well as about plant and wild animal life. We feel that we have done our small part in tracing life from "birth to death" in at least a miniature way in the Trailside Museum.

A friend visited us during the summer and together we discussed various considerations in nature trail work. We had been speaking of vandalism, of damage done to signs along the trail. During the last season the attendance had almost doubled, and consequently more harm had been done to signs. More labels were scratched, torn down, and otherwise made useless. We learned to resign ourselves to this sort of thing.

After some time, our friend said, "Well if a nature trail can be

successfully run here, at Bear Mountain, with all the rabble that comes your way, the thing can be done anywhere!"

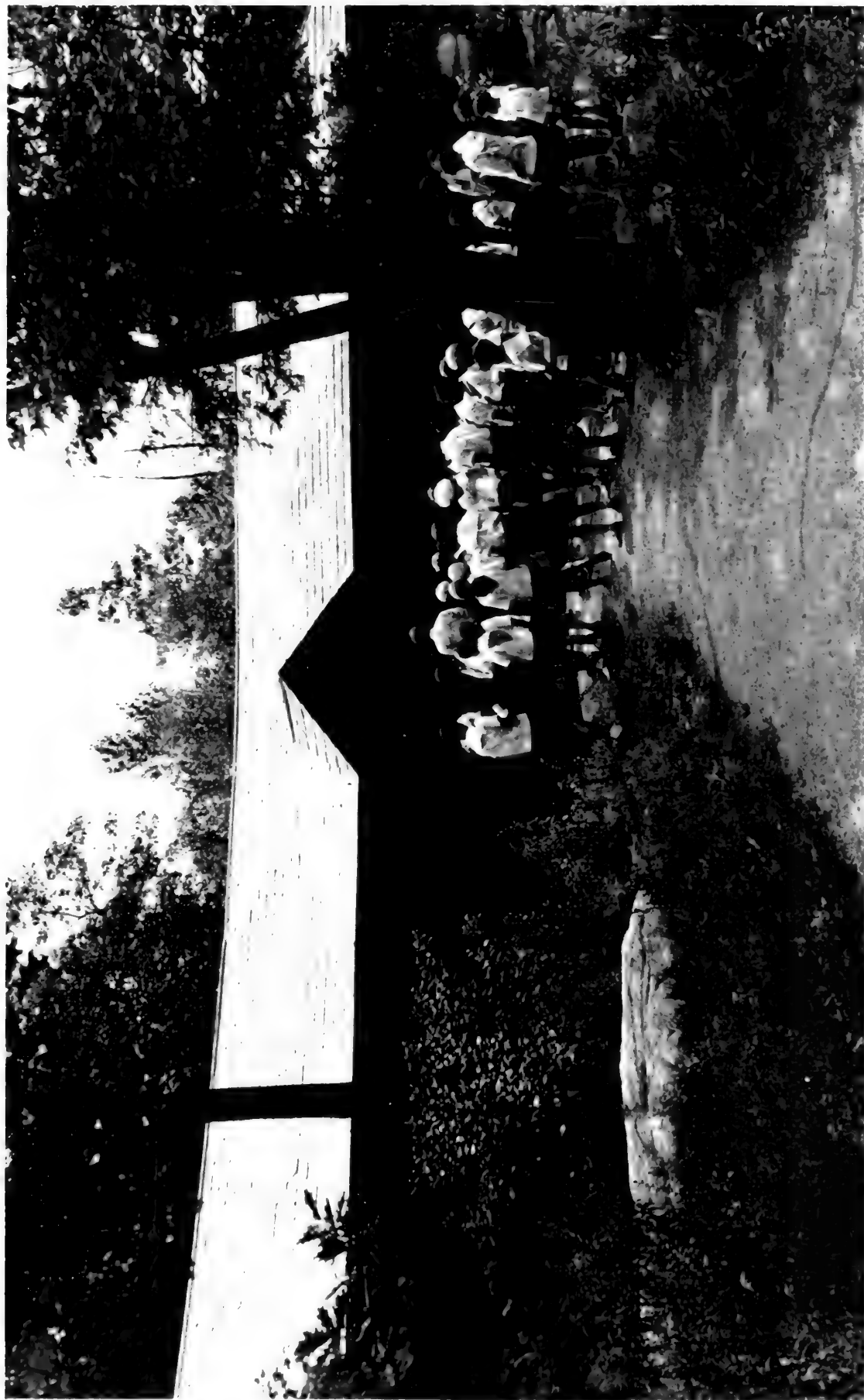
To be sure, some few and very few among thousands might well have been classified as "undesirables." These few did most of the damage. We have tried many times to devise schemes for preventing a certain amount of destruction, realizing, of course, that some degree of vandalism is inevitably to be expected.

But "rabble"? No! and again no! Of course the majority of the people who come to us are poor in this world's goods. They are also poverty stricken in the way of opportunity for enlarging their mental and cultural experiences. This very fact is one of the principle reasons for our work and for our geographical location. We deserve no particular congratulations or acclaim for the fact that we can maintain some two thousand labels and a museum at Bear Mountain. We would, however, earn hearty disapprobation if we could not! The opportunities for doing good work are so numerous that we could never in one life-time take full advantage of them. What if some of our out-of-door exhibits are destroyed? We make it our business to replace them, bearing in mind



NEW CAGES

Although built from odds and ends of scrap material, these animal cages were serviceable..



THE BEAR MOUNTAIN TRAILSIDE MUSEUM

A group of campers about to enter where the shade was welcome on a warm, summer day.

the fact that wear and tear accompany any educational undertaking.

In connection with this problem of reaching various types of visitors, we were much interested in a statement made by Dr. Hermon C. Bumpus, chairman of the Committee on Outdoor Education of the American Association of Museums. Dr. Bumpus has probably achieved more toward the advancement of nature education in our National Parks than any other American. In a report entitled "Trailside Museums" he compares the aims of our own project with a similar out-of-door museum on the Grand Canyon of the Colorado in Arizona.

"The first," he says, speaking of the Bear Mountain Museum in the terms of anticipated results, "would demonstrate the reaction of a polyglot population of rather limited financial and intellectual resources. The second (Grand Canyon) would try out the attitude of people who had 'achieved success' sufficient to enable them to pay the cost of travel and who, presumably, were desirous of becoming better informed concerning their own country, responding, perhaps, to the slogan, 'See America First.'"*

Yes, we do have extremely varied types of visitors. Nevertheless, along with the "polyglot population," we have considerable numbers of the "See America First" type, too! Witness the fact that our guest book shows names from every state in the union, as well as signatures of persons from more than thirty foreign countries. Furthermore, the percentage of visitors coming from distant points is much larger than might seem apparent. Thus we must satisfy all types and classes. As a general rule, exhibits of interest to Judy O'Grady also please the Colonel's Lady, or vice versa. The so-called scientific mind is possessed by relatively few people, whether they be fortunate or unfortunate as regards personal wealth or mental ability.

The underlying popular appeal of nature exposition kindles ideas in the absorbed minds of watchers and listeners, without reference to social, cultural, or worldly position. There is really no such thing as a "class appreciation" of the "wonders of nature," either in the open or in a true open-air museum that seeks to clarify facts and present to eyewitnesses some of the tangible creations of the woods, fields, and streams without conscious restriction or even the suggestion of, shall we say, the "holier than thou" attitude.

We know a man who visited a secondhand book store to search for bargains. The manager of the store led him to a second floor room and proceeded, as his kind are apt to do, to pull down the most expensive

*(The Museum Journal—Vol. XXX, pp. 6-11, July, 1930). (London.)

volumes. After a time, seeing that the customer was bent on examining the shelves for himself, he disappeared down stairs. The searcher, failing to locate what he wanted, observed another room adjoining the one in which he stood. Leaning over the stairway, he called,

"I can't find what I want here. Have you any books in the front room?"

"Oh yes," returned the proprietor, "but they are on special subjects. They're old books, too. You wouldn't be interested!"

The buyer reddened at this. He considered it as a personal snub, which, no doubt it was, and betook himself elsewhere.

The store owner had probably gone by outward appearance alone, misjudging his man, and had undoubtedly lost a sale.

So it is with nature teaching. Who is to say what a given person will be interested in? A poor and an unlettered man may, and often does, look upon a great painting or other work of art, or upon a natural object with intense appreciation, even though his specific education be lacking and he fails to realize from whence his instincts come pushing to the surface. His appreciation is an emotional one, and has to do with a feeling, an experience deeper than either mere outward appearance or actual or superficial "polish." Walt Whitman wrote:

"Because, having look'd at the objects of the Universe,

I find there is no one, nor any particle of one, but has reference to the soul."

There it is, in a few words! The soul of man is an all encompassing, yet unknown factor with which we deal, day in and day out. If we can somehow reach the soul we need not fear, whether our guest be a day laborer or a college president! Incidentally, we have been led to believe that the souls of some college presidents are quite difficult to plumb!

Obviously there is a greater degree of pleasure or profit, or both, that depends upon the cultural background of the observer. We seldom feel, however, that our exhibits are responsible for the ultimate result in this direction. In other words, simplicity and clarity should be the keynote. The visitor will determine the educational result in so far as his individual understanding is concerned. Regardless, then, of class distinction, when discussing the most valued group, the group to which we may give the most service, even though we include all types, we are led to shout, "Bring on the Rabble!"



LOOKING UP THE HUDSON

The Bear Mountain Bridge and the boat docks showing two methods of approach to the Park.



DETAIL OF NATURE TRAIL MODEL

At the left is the museum perched on the Cliffs overlooking the Hudson 175 feet below.

A number of new features were added to the Bear Mountain Nature Trails during the summer of 1930. Near the Trailside Craftshop, at the trail's end, four animal cages were installed. **Animals Without Labels** A young Gray Fox occupied one cage, a tame Raccoon lived in another, a Great Horned Owl and a Gray Squirrel entertained visitors in the other two cages.

This section was very popular with visitors, especially with campers who came to us in bus loads during July and August. There were no



“COCO”

This very tame Raccoon was regarded with affection by many hundreds of children. She was a real pet in every sense of the word.

labels on any of the cages. We purposely omitted them, for this season, to study the effect on the observers. Somehow, it seemed to us that people ought to know the Gray Squirrel. Also they should have known the difference between a Fox and a Raccoon. In many cases, however, we were doomed to disappointment.



"CAROLINE"

This little fox came from North Carolina to attract and delight trailside visitors.

One afternoon, we left the craftshop on our way to the museum, to discover at least twenty persons standing before the animal cages, enjoying immensely the antics of "Coco," the sportive Coon. Coco loved an audience and seemed always to make an especial effort to entertain. She was as playful as a puppy. We had built a small seesaw in her cage. She played with this by the hour, dividing her attention between it and the water basin. When the seesaw bored her, she would dash to the water pan, splash herself thoroughly, and then, with utmost deliberation, proceed to turn it over, usually managing to drench herself in the process.

As we stood back watching the performance, the other spectators fairly shrieked in glee. The children, particularly, were overjoyed, and Coco, catching the spirit of the occasion, lay on her back, and balancing the basin on her feet, gave a comical glance at the crowd and commenced to "worry" the basin back and forth.

"What a dear little monkey!" exclaimed a woman. "Wouldn't it be nice to have one home, Junior?"

"Is that what it really is,—a monkey?" asked the boy.

"Oh yes," she replied. "It's a long haired monkey. See how clever it is with those fore paws? Only monkeys have fingers like that!"

And this in the day of raccoon coats throughout the length and breadth of the land!

"I thought it was a fox," offered Junior.

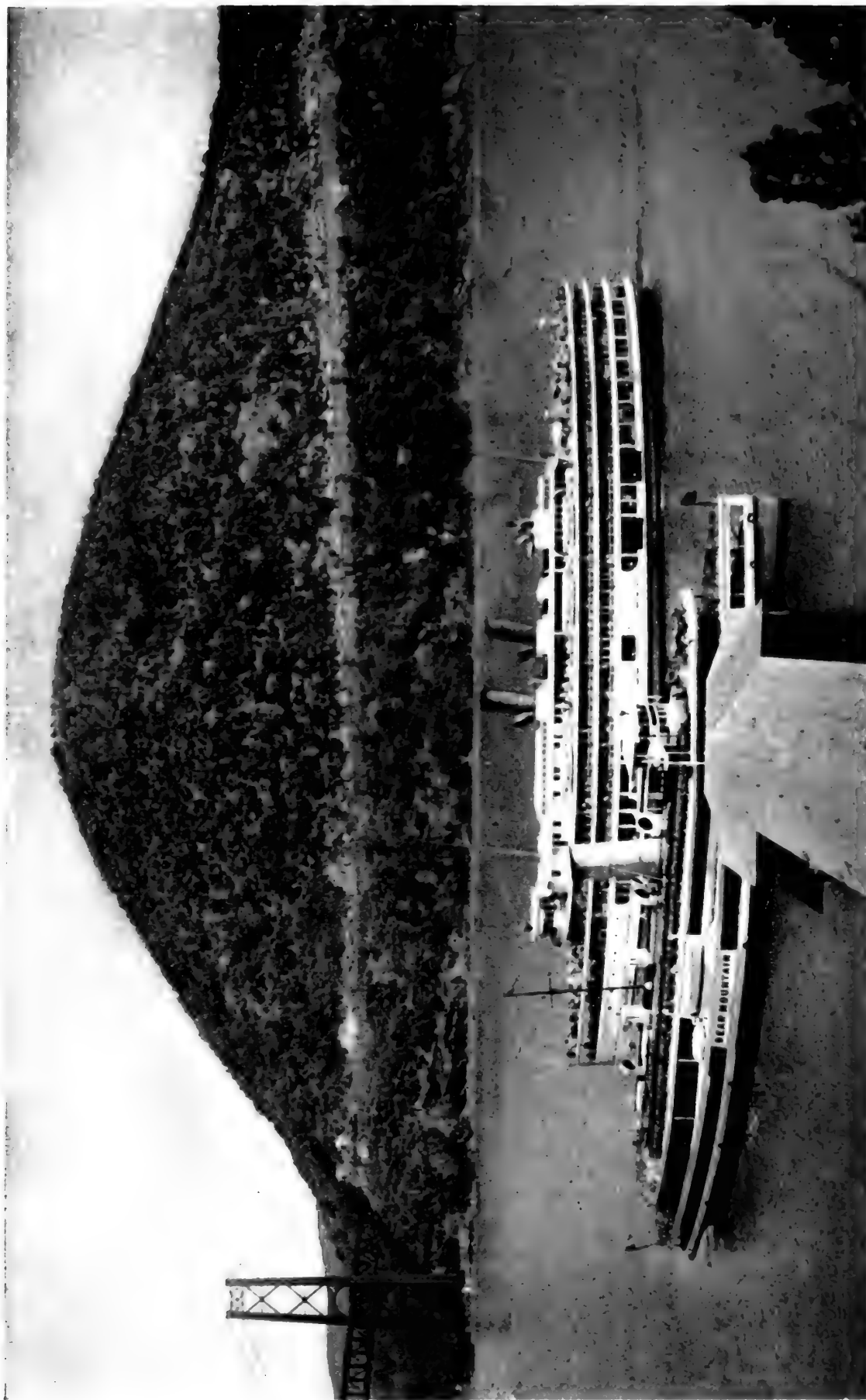
"No, no!" said Mother. "How could it be a fox?"

"Well then," returned her son, pointing to "Caroline," the fox in the next cage, "what is that animal? I thought it was a fox, but you said 'No' to that, too! I thought a fox was like a dog. See, its head is just like a dog's."

"It may be a fox," said the mother, temporizing, "I'm not sure. Ask the man when you go back to the museum. Anyway, I'm positive the animal in this cage is a monkey. Why! It couldn't be anything else and what fun it is to watch whatever it is!"

At this point we interrupted the conversation to explain that although Coco's feet were very "monkey-like," she was truly not a monkey but a raccoon! We also cleared up the fox mystery. Another season, we simply *must* place labels on those cages!

As we were about to turn away from Coco's cage and continue our



ANTHONY'S NOSE ACROSS THE RIVER

The Boat landing on the Hudson where many thousand of visitors come ashore.

interrupted walk, three bus loads of campers drove in and stopped in our parking space. In as short a time as it takes to tell, some sixty children poured out and surrounded us. This was to be quite a different affair from that of "Junior" and his "Mother"! Forgotten for the moment were the "Couples" and the "Rabble." Here were alert youngsters, all of whom had spent some time in the woods. Many of them had ex-



CAMPERS AND CAGES

These four enclosures housed the Raccoon, Gray Squirrel, Fox and Great Horned Owl.

perienced nature work and teaching. There was no need to label the raccoon and the fox, as far as they were concerned!

We broke away from the group, promising to meet them at the museum after they had walked over the trails.

Soon they arrived at the little stone building, and then the fun began.

Questions, questions, and still more questions flew!

"What is this?"

"Why does it act this way?"

"What's it good for?", etc., etc.



MODEL BUILDING

Nature councilors visited our Trailside Craftshop for instruction in nature training methods.



BEAVER HOUSE MODEL

This cross-section, showing the lodge interior, was made by nature councilors.

Most of the queries were intelligent and were asked sincerely.

In a glass tank on one of the aquarium tables, a banded pickerel, caught in a nearby pond, swam gently and gracefully around and around. The children were interested at once.

"How long have you had him?"

"What does he eat?"

"How do you catch them?"

This same fish had attracted numbers of persons during the summer. It had been caught in late April and for more than five months had lived with us. At least a dozen times the fish had leaped from its tank to the floor, only to be quietly returned by one of us. It fed on minnows and pollywogs, and if ever a fish were tame, this one certainly was.

"Could we see a pickerel anywhere near our camp?" asked one of the girls.

"Yes, indeed," we answered. "This one came from a small pond leading into Queensboro Lake, not far from your camp site. If you are careful not to make a noise, and hide yourself in the brush along the stream near the place where the stream empties into the lake, you may very well see a pickerel and many other interesting things, too."

"You said the pickerel feeds on minnows, as well as other things," said another camper. "I suppose that's why he swims up the brook. I've seen plenty of minnows in brooks. We'll go over some day and look for a pickerel."

The group spent at least an hour in the museum and then wandered back up the trail to the waiting autos.

In each camping center in the Palisades Interstate Park, within a radius of seventeen miles from our Trailside Museum, are nature centers, known as "Regional Museums." These are maintained by the Palisades Interstate Park Commissioners, under the direction of Miss Ruby M. Jolliffe. We can notice the benefit to the children who come in contact with these museums, five of which were in operation during the season of 1930. The group of which we were just writing had been influenced by one of these small institutions. If the two campers interested in our pickerel follow up their desire to see one in the wild, they will no doubt tell their local museum director or their nature councilor "all about it."

We so strongly approve of these Regional Museums that we are only too glad to aid them when we are able. There was a new museum established this year and we practically equipped it. This is entirely voluntary with us, and for that very reason, we enjoy it immensely.

During each season we are visited by groups of teachers from universities, grade schools, and training centers. They come in bus loads to



STORIES BY THE CAMPFIRE

The presentation of evening lectures in various camps, was one way of arousing nature interest.



LECTURE TO CAMP NATURE COUNCILORS

This regional museum director gave instruction to leaders as well as to children.

observe our trails and museum, and to study methods. Many are the valuable suggestions we have received from these guests. A class from the Danbury State Normal School in Connecticut has visited us for the past three years, representing a typical group of young women who are not only interested in learning to teach indoors, but are also aware of the possibilities offered by out-of-door nature study.

As a rule we guide the teachers along the trails, answering questions and explaining various features. Then the guests are invited to rest on Geology Point, where a discussion is held and a "talk" given. Also we invariably go into the field with the students, for many of them have heard of our nearby beaver ponds and are anxious to see them. We had the good fortune on one memorable occasion, while leading a group of some twenty teachers along an old substantial beaver dam, to see the occupant of the pond swim directly before us where all could see. The old beaver traveled back and forth several times and then, evidently disapproving of the school marm's, brought his tail down with a loud "Crack!" and disappeared. I doubt whether either the beaver or the teachers will forget that experience!

The numerous beaver colonies in the Interstate Park are by no means to be overlooked as aids to teaching. They present, in a most natural and satisfactory way, a fascinating story. Many hundreds of campers are familiar with the work of this "animal engineer," and many have "gone at evening" to see the builders in action. It is a unique opportunity for city children to be simply initiated into the world of the woods.

We have encouraged the campers to study the dams and lodges, to make drawings and models of the beaver's creations, and gain personal knowledge by first hand experience. Lectures about beaver, illustrated with colored lantern slides, are given in camps at night. Campfire stories about this rodent are ever popular. If one should ask us, "Who is the best Nature Teacher or Councilor in your region?" We would answer, "The Beaver!"

Nature teaching as we carry it along is, I suppose, somewhat like certain types of missionary work in far flung places. We have a great deal to offer, yet nothing to force down the throats of those with whom we come in contact. There is nothing to "sell," yet "salesmanship" plays its valuable part. An out-of-door museum is the background for a great deal that transpires in human nature. There is a constant panorama of people, of all sorts and classes, who pass and pause as they appear and disappear. The only thing constant is the need for work and more work, of new ideas and of an unflagging interest in the visitor and his view point.

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